Third Realm

OCTOBER 10 – DECEMBER 22, 2019

Education Guide

Sun Xun, *Shock of Time*, 2006
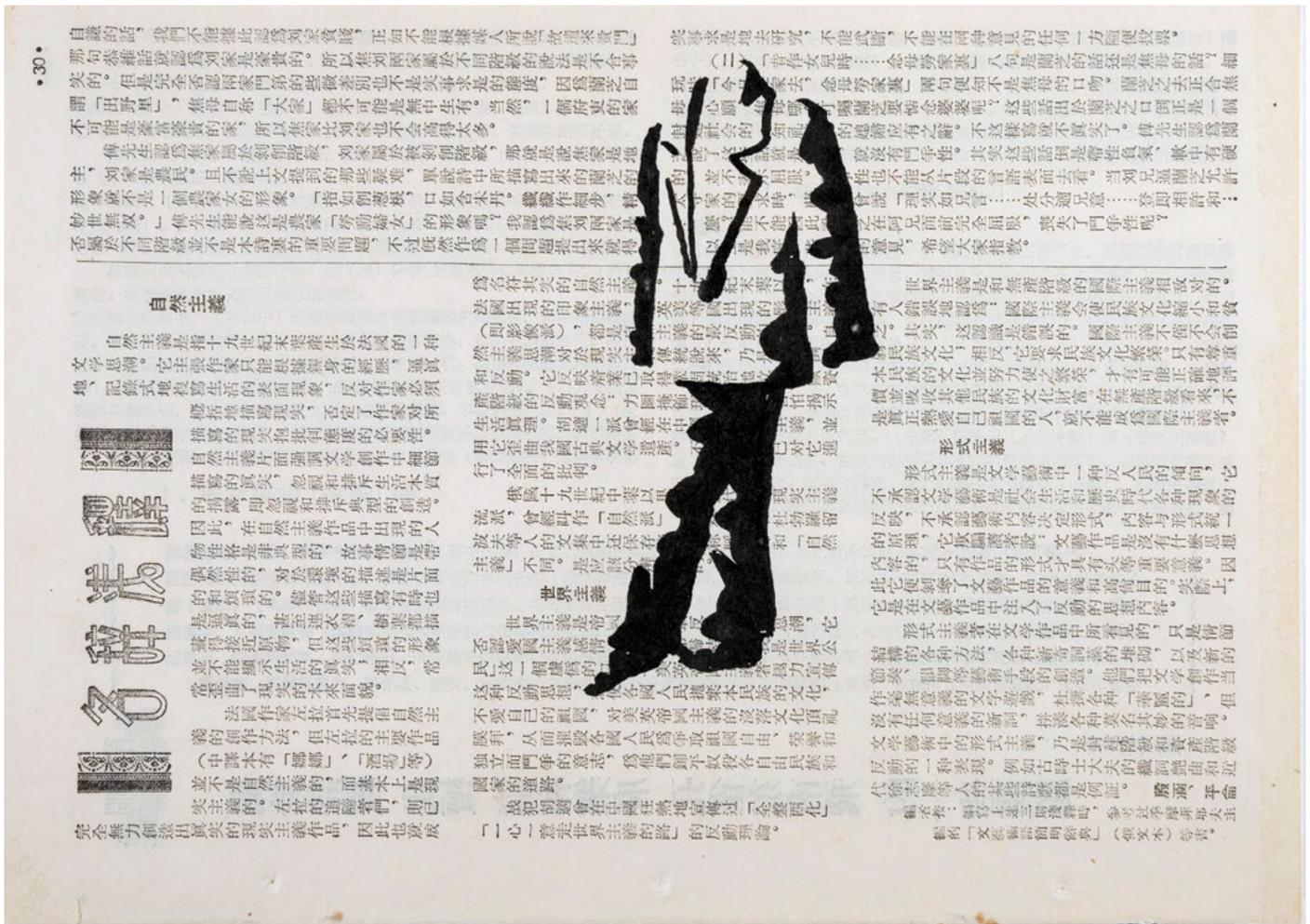
MoCP Museum of Contemporary Photography | Columbia COLLEGE CHICAGO

FarEastFarWest

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

ILLINOIS ARTS COUNCIL AGENCY

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Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *The Field,* 2009

INTRODUCTION

Capturing nearly a decade of crucial artistic production in Asia (2007–2013), *Third Realm* presents works by sixteen artists who use photography, film, installation, and performance to investigate nonbinary spaces—between past and present, local and global, secular and sacred. Works in this exhibition were created on commission by the FarEastFarWest collection, a Shanghai-based organization that funds and acquires contemporary Asian artworks and is housed on extended loan at the MoCP. Featuring artists predominantly from China, as well as Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, and projects developed in Asia by international artists, *Third Realm* connects works from across East and Southeast Asia to present a select view of contemporary Asian art. This exhibition is curated by FarEastFarWest co-founder Davide Quadrio.

FEATURED ARTISTS

Birdhead (Song Tao, China, b. 1979 and Ji Weiyu, China, b. 1980)

Cao Fei (China, b. 1978)

Heman Chong (Singapore, b. 1977)

Comfortable Collective (Jin Shan, China, b. 1977; Maya Kramer, America, b. 1977; and Li Mu, China, b. 1974)

FX Harsono (Indonesia, b. 1949)

Jompet Kuswidananto (Indonesia, b. 1976)

Sutee Kunavichayanon (Thailand, b. 1965)

Surasi Kusolwong (Thailand, b. 1965)

Lu Yang (China, b. 1984)

Gary Ross Pastrana (Philippines, b. 1977)

Paola Pivi (Italy, b. 1971)

Sun Xun (China, b. 1980)

Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand, b. 1970)

Xijing Men (Tsuyoshi Ozawa, Japan, b. 1965; Chen Shaoxiong, China, 1962–2016; Gim Hong-Sok, Korea, b. 1964)

Yang Zhenzhong (China, b. 1968)

Zhou Xiaohu (China, b. 1960)

Xijing Men — Tsuyoshi Ozawa , Chen Shaoxiong, and Gim Hong-sok, *This is Xijing — The Life of the Xijing Presidents (Urban Planning),* 2008

Background on the FarEastFarWest Collection

FarEastFarWest was founded in 2007 by Eric Guichard and Davide Quadrio and serves as a production platform for artistic projects. The shared goal of its co-founders is to identify artists, select projects, and produce pieces that address contemporary issues relevant to life in Asia.

Davide Quadrio states:

> *The FarEastFarWest Collection was born in the mid-2000s, primarily as a reaction to the rapidly expanding art market in China, where I was living and collecting at the time. During this period, the contemporary art world in China (as well as other regions throughout Asia) was emerging at a heightened velocity, while vast speculation was at an all-time high, spurred on by auction houses, galleries, and even artists themselves. This climate, to my mind, created an ecosystem that seemed to place artistic creation last. I sought to develop a corrective to this by creating FarEastFarWest, a more project-based approach to commissioning new work designed to empower artists to broach complex subjects through providing a more curatorial—rather than market-driven—pathway to building a collection and supporting creative output.*

KEY THEMES IN THE EXHIBITION

Two key themes within this exhibition are the Performance of Ritual and Shifting National Identities. With a focus on artistic experimentation, the works confront the effects of rapid economic growth, the explosion of consumer culture, and the social dynamics of urbanization and globalization, while considering longstanding cultural traditions and complex histories within each artists' respective countries.

PERFORMANCE OF RITUAL

Many artists in this exhibition use performance, video, and other time-based works as a vehicle to interpret ritual. Curator Davide Quadrio states:

The relationship between time-based actions and rituality are fundamentally intertwined. In religion, particularly Buddhism, it is often the process of an action that inscribes it with sacredness; likewise, in process-driven art, the practice of the action is, in turn, what suggests meaning.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- What is your first impression of the exhibition? Without reading any texts on the artists' works, would you see ritual as a theme? Why or why not?

- What rituals do you perform in your daily life? How might these rituals be connected to larger cultural traditions?

Lu Yang, Still from *Wrathful King Kong Core*, 2011

Exhibition Highlight

In *Wrathful King Kong Core* (2011), Lu Yang (China, b. 1984) explores the intersection of science and religion. In this film that recalls the appearance of virtual reality and video games, brightly-colored digital animations of Tibetan Buddhist deities populate the screen. These figures, while demonic in appearance, represent mercy in the Buddhist faith and are motivated by compassion. The film methodically analyzes the Buddhist figures, alongside imagery of the brain's response to anger. This imagery was created with technologies that map cognition. Collectively, the film implies that that through state-of-the-art biotechnology, even the spiritual realm can be digitized.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- How might technology function as a liminal, or transitional, third space detached from reality?

- How are practices of spirituality tied to the ritual? How might this relate to processes in artmaking?
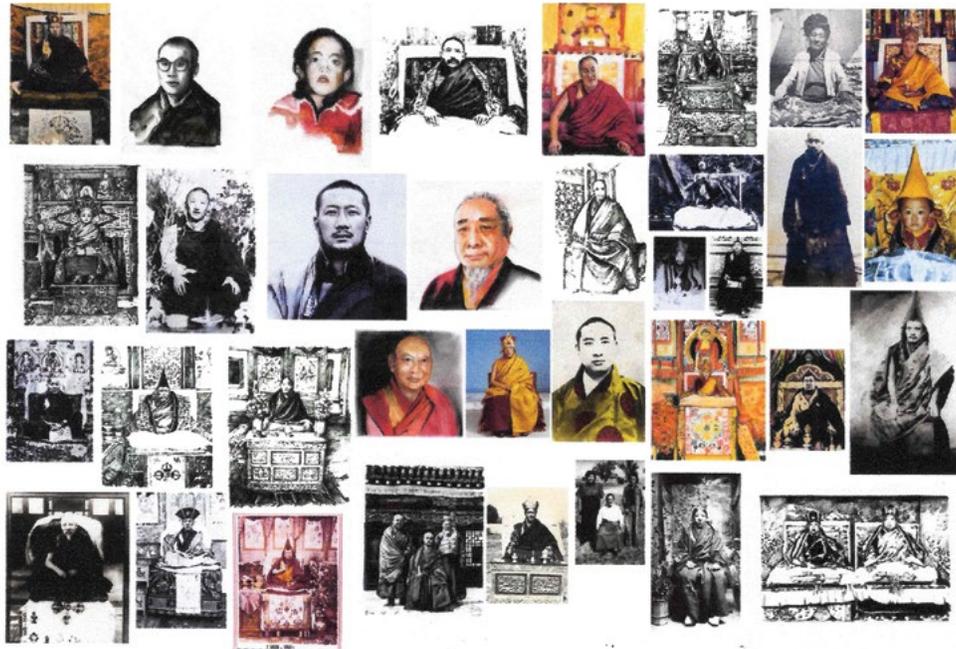
Paola Pivi, *Tulkus 1880 to 2018*, 2012–2013

Exhibition Highlight

In the installation, *Tulkus 1880 to 2018* (2012–ongoing), Paola Pivi (Italy, b. 1971) displays hundreds of photographic portraits of tulkus dating back nearly 150 years. *Tulku* is a term in Tibetan Buddhism meaning "transforming body," referring to one identified as the reincarnate of a deceased Buddhist master. When an old tulku departs, a council of senior lamas assembles to find the young reincarnation, often beginning with the writings or clues given during his last days as to where he intends to be reborn. Identified as young children, the child tulku is recognized as having a capacity for spiritual enlightenment, regarded as a "precious one," and raised to carry on the tulku lineage inside a monastery.

This project—which is still a work in progress—aims to achieve a comprehensive survey of tulkus belonging to the various Buddhist and Bonpo schools, in all areas where Tibetan Buddhism is practiced. A complete photographic archive of this kind has never been compiled before. These images are holy for Buddhists, as the photographs themselves are believed to possess the same power as the tulku. By placing these images within the museum context, Pivi suggests that sacred spaces can be encountered anywhere, even within the walls of a gallery or museum.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- Why might the curator—the organizer of this exhibition—choose this body of work to relate to the larger themes of the exhibition of ritual and shifting national identity? How does this series compare or contrast with the video work depicting aspects of Buddhism by Lu Yang?

- Consider the belief that a photograph of a spiritual teacher can possess spiritual power. How might the installation of hundreds of these types of photographs together alter, diminish, or enhance this notion?

FX Harsono, Still from *Writing in the Rain*, 2011

Exhibition Highlight

Born and raised in Indonesia, FX Harsono (Indonesia, b. 1949) is ethnically Chinese, a minority that has historically been discriminated against by the Indonesian majority. In *Writing in the Rain* (2011), Harsono writes his name in Chinese characters on a clear wall, as both an assertion of identity as well as a nod to the cultural significance of calligraphy in Chinese culture. The connection between one's name and culture is especially pertinent for the author; as a teenager in the 1960s, an official cultural assimilation measure (which remained in effect until 2000) pushed him to change his given name to one that was more Indonesian-sounding. In the video, as rain eventually begins to fall, dissolving the text, Harsono continues writing, highlighting the persistence necessary to retain cultural identity when one is not part of the dominant culture. The piece emphasizes the delicate nature of identity, suggesting the sense of loss that comes with being culturally erased within one's own nation.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- What significance does your name have to your own identity?

- Have you ever seen or experienced efforts of cultural assimilation in your life? Explain.

SHIFTING NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Many of the works in *Third Realm* profoundly reflect a sociopolitical shift during the 2000s, when China's economic prosperity began to command global attention. Many artists consider departures from traditions, as China and other nations adapt to new economic and social models influenced by globalization.

Jompet Kuswidananto, *Family Chronicle #1*, from the *Java's Machine: Family Chronicle* project, 2011

Exhibition Highlight

Jompet Kuswidananto (Indonesia, b. 1976) explores the complex history of colonialism in his homeland of Indonesia. Using video and multimedia installations, he examines the ways in which outside influences have transformed the country's social and political fabric. In his series, *Java's Machine: Family Chronicle* (2011), the artist investigates how one's ties to tradition are threatened by the rise of globalization. Using the family unit as a metaphor for national loyalties, a traditional father and modern son are presented as estranged from one another, dramatizing the tensions between old and new in contemporary Indonesian society.

Defining the "Third Realm"

Jompet Kuswidananto, *Third Realm Venice Series #2*, 2011,

In his mixed-media installation, *Third Realm* (2011), which inspired the title of this exhibition, Jompet Kuswidananto features headless figures in colonial dress arranged as if in a floating military drill.

According to the Buddhist faith and cosmology, there is a belief in three realms of existence, or destinations, for karmic rebirth, which are achieved through meditation: *Kāmaloka*, the *Realm of Desire*, *Rūpaloka*, the *Realm of Form*, and *Arūpaloka*, the *Realm of No Form*. The third realm, the Realm of No Form, is thought of as the highest form—one beyond material or worldly desires and with no physicality.

The artist's title for this installation implies that, like the process of transcending from one meditative state into the next, Indonesia's colonial past is inescapable as it forms a more modern national identity. The bodiless figures in nineteenth-century attire are arranged like phantoms in an arrangement that suggests a merging of historical and contemporary moments into a third space that is neither past nor present, and without tangible form.

Cao Fei (Second Life Avatar: China Tracy), *RMB City Opera: The Revolution,* 2009

Exhibition Highlight

Cao Fei's (China, b. 1978) *RMB City Opera* explores the roles people play—both online and in society—and the sense of disorientation felt by younger generations growing up in a swiftly changing China. For this film, the artist used Second Life, an online roleplaying game that emerged in the early 2000s. Within the game, Cao created a fictitious place called *RMB City,* taking its name from the Chinese currency named RMB as a critique on the level of growing consumerism in China. This film documents a 2010 performance, in which Cao engages her Second Life avatar, China Tracy, through a series of acts with a romantic partner. Real actors perform in front of the screen, juxtaposing two forms of existence—actual and virtual—onto a single plane and highlighting the sense of isolation and loneliness one can experience while encountering others virtually. Additionally, Cao uses the iconography associated with the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) along with new forms of advertising and media, to highlight tensions between past and present in a new China.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- Consider the films, photographs, and installation works in this exhibition collectively. Which medium do you respond to the most? Why?

- Why might each artist choose their particular medium for their respective concepts?

- Consider the statement by Davide Quadrio in his essay for the exhibition:
  Individually, many of these artists seek to define their unique realms in the world, using ritual, gesture, and performance to excavate the complexities of their hybrid identities and lives.
  What hybrid identities might you have in your own life? What rituals or gestures might you be using daily to demonstrate this sense of identity?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Photograph a day in your life, hour by hour. You can take as many or as few images each hour as you like, but make sure to create at least one image per hour.

Capture the everyday moments, such as doing the dishes, brushing your teeth, eating dinner, or walking to school or work. Consider the rooms of your home and how your belongings might also tell the story of your identity.
Then, arrange each image in order chronologically.

- What behaviors or rituals might you repeat every day that you perhaps did not notice before?

- How might these rituals represent your social or cultural identity?

- Could someone looking at these images gain an understanding about the details of your life, such as your age, political or religious beliefs, or location? How or how not? Discuss with others.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

avatar
An icon or figure representing a real person in video games or online.

Bonpo
Practitioners of the Tibetan folk religion Bon whose principles and practice predate Buddhist practice. Those who identify as Bonpo believe there to be supernatural powers in the inanimate and material worlds and engage in a shamanic ritual involving gestures of offerings and animal sacrifice.

Buddhism
The world's fourth-largest religion based on the teachings of Buddha centered on overcoming suffering and the cycle of death and rebirth. Buddhism originated in India in the 6th and 4th centuries BCE.

Tibetan Buddhism
A form of Buddhism and the dominant religion practiced in Tibet, an autonomous region in western China. This form of Buddhism stems from the latest stages of Indian Buddhism, which is also part of the tantric Vajrayana tradition. However, it also includes native Tibetan developments and practices.

Cultural Revolution
A period in China from 1966–1976 under the dictatorship of Mao Zedong. The goal of this movement was to preserve Communism at all costs, while entirely erasing marks of Capitalism and tradition. During this time, an estimated 500,000 to 2,000,000 people died due to famine or other human rights violations.

cultural assimilation
A smaller group or culture assuming the values or identities of a larger, more dominant group or culture.

globalization
When a local economy expands into a global market. The exchange of goods and monies across borders.

karmic rebirth
In Buddhism, the belief that how one lives impacts their next life or next form of existence.

ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS
ADDRESSED IN THIS GUIDE

Visual Arts Standards

VA:Re7.2.K–12 Perceive and analyze artistic work. Visual imagery influences understanding of, and responses to, the world.

VA:Re8.K–12 Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

VA:Re9.K–12 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. People evaluate art based on various criteria.

VA:Cn11.K–12 Relate artistic ideas and works with social, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.